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UNCLAS HANOI 001727

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR DRL/IRF AND EAP/BCLTV

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: FURTHER REDUCTION IN FATHER LY'S SENTENCE

REF: A. HANOI 1699 B. 03 HANOI 1821 C. 01 HANOI 2789

1. (U) The Foreign Ministry on July 17 confirmed media reports that the Nam Ha Provincial Court had further reduced by five years the sentence of Father Thadaeus Nguyen Van Ly in tribute to his satisfactory compliance with the regulations of the Nam Ha prison. Father Ly had originally been sentenced on October 19, 2001 to a thirteen year sentence for "undermining national unity" and an additional two year sentence for violating provisions of an earlier administrative detention order (ref c). The Nam Ha court had first reduced his sentences by five years on July 16, 2003 (ref b) in recognition of "good behavior." The MFA source also confirmed that Father Ly would remain subject to a five-year administrative detention order following his release, now scheduled for 2006.

2. (SBU) The Government Committee on Religious Affairs declined to confirm to Embassy the sentence reduction or provide a comment. However, one staffer privately admitted having recently participated in an inter-agency session to discuss the possibility of the sentence reduction.

3. (SBU) Comment: Our Foreign Ministry contact implied clearly that this decision, like that to release prisoner of concern Le Chi Quang two years ahead of his original sentence (ref a), had been intended to create a good atmosphere for DRL A/S Craner's planned June 18 visit to Hanoi, now postponed until later in the year. Our contact indicated, however, that there would be no additional bits of good news, noting "aren't these two decisions enough?"
PORTER